

RECORDS OF THE QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM, LAUNCESTON

Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Nicholas Coventry Braddon P.C., K.C.M.G.,
1829-1904

(Biographical Notes)

By

JOHN REYNOLDS

The Braddons are an old Cornish family. The first member recorded 'at Heralds' College is Stephen Braddon of Treworgrey, who sat as the member for Bosinney in Queen Elizabeth I's earliest Parliament, 1558-1563. His grandson, William Braddon, played a notable part in the unsettled times of the Civil Wars. He held the rank of commander in Cromwell's army and sat in Parliament in 1651 as the member for his native county. His epitaph might well be inscribed on the grave of his distant descendant, the subject of these notes, it reads

'In War and Peace I bore command
Both Sword and Gown I wore.'

The next member of the family known to history is Laurence Braddon, a writer on political subjects. The mysterious death of the Earl of Essex in 1683 in the Tower of London engaged his interest. The Earl was imprisoned for his alleged part in the Rye House Plot; his death was reported as suicide. Laurence Braddon, a well-known pamphleteer, risked his neck and liberty by the persistence with which he sought to prove that the case was, in fact, one of political murder.

During the eighteenth, and early part of the nineteenth century, 'the Golden Age of the Country Gentlemen', the Braddons lived in quiet obscurity as small squires, vicars and professional men who married into other West Country families of their 'own station'. In the second decade of the nineteenth century one Henry Braddon of Skisdon Lodge broke away from the family tradition and married Fanny White, a vivacious and beautiful daughter of a gentleman of County Cavan. He was John White who was an historical and legal writer of some note in his day. One of his grandsons was probably the greatest of British journalists, John Thadeus Delane, who edited the London Times for thirty-six years (1841-1877). Henry Braddon was no 'Squire Western', for he was a highly cultivated solicitor and the author of a number of works on sporting subjects.

Two of the children of Henry and Fanny Braddon were destined to pursue notable careers far beyond the borders of Cornwall. The first was the subject of these notes, the Hon. Sir Edward Braddon, and the other the well-known popular novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1837-1915). Edward Nicholas Coventry Braddon was born at Skisdon Lodge on 11 June, 1829. Very few facts of his boyhood and youth have been preserved. It is certain, however, that he inherited in full measure his family's love of country life and sports. Unlike most of the sons of the country gentry, he did not enter one of the ancient schools and Universities. He was educated privately, probably by some fine classical scholar and humanist. His father must have possessed considerable insight and understanding for he sent 'Nick'—as he was usually known—to the new University College in London. There he received the type of education exactly suited to his temperament, and for a career in commerce and administration.

In 1847, at the age of eighteen, young Braddon went to Calcutta to join the staff of a merchant's house owned by a relative. It was a familiar path to fame and fortune taken by energetic young Britishers in the nineteenth century. After ten years in the counting house sharpening his nimble wits in dealing with Asiatic business men, he was translated to congenial fields of action by the outbreak of the Great Mutiny. In its emergency the Government appointed this capable, restless young man to the dangerous post of Assistant-Commissioner in the Santhalia District. Passing from the strict letter of his instructions to maintain order, he raised a regiment and led it to battle in the campaign conducted by General Sir George Yule. Like his Cromwellian ancestor, his leadership was successful; he was decorated, mentioned in despatches, and thanked by the government of Bengal for 'energetic and timely action'.

After the suppression of the Mutiny Braddon settled down to an administrative career, receiving the appointment of Commissioner of Stamps and Excise in Oudh. During the next twenty years he occupied increasingly responsible positions in the financial administration of the great province. It is recorded that he did 'excellent service in the cause of departmental reform and placed the provincial finances on a firm basis, although faced with a heavy deficit at the outset due to the confusion resulting from the Mutiny'. In 1857 he married Amy G. Palmer and, some years after her death, Alice H. Smith (1876), who long survived him. There were two sons and four daughters of the first marriage. His second son, Hon. Sir Henry Yule Braddon, K.B.E., now living in Sydney, has had a distinguished career in commerce.

In India Braddon found full scope for the development of his sporting instincts. He played polo and hunted in many parts of the sub-continent. These experiences

he described in a book of reminiscence—'Twenty Years of Shikar' (1895). With a lively pen he tells 'good stories of hunting tigers, elephants, panthers, and many fearsome fowl!' (from a review). In an earlier book 'Life in India' (1872) he vividly describes the contemporary scene as witnessed by an Anglo-Indian official. Both these works are long out of print but they have a freshness which makes them always readable.

After thirty years of Indian life and climate Braddon retired (1878) on a well-earned pension. Retirement is hardly the term for this period because he was to climb to heights in public life undreamt by an Indian provincial official. He chose Leith, near Devonport, (Tasmania) for his new home. Acquiring a small farm in an attractive situation, he built a bungalow having wide verandahs, which he named Treglith; unfortunately this pleasant home was destroyed by fire towards the end of his life. It might be reasonable to assume that the pioneering townsmen, farmers and 'back blocks' people of the Tasmanian North-West Coastal districts would hardly take kindly to an autocratic ex-Indian official. Such an assumption proved entirely unfounded in fact. The local people were delighted to discover the newcomer was no aloof and frigid 'Pukka Sahib'; his wife was full of a charm which endeared her to all. He plunged into the life of the community with a boyish zest. He was the life of cricket matches, hunting and fishing expeditions and of the marathon dances which usually followed them. On one of his hunting expeditions, in spite of his excellent marksmanship, he 'winged' a youth who is now the Honorable Alexander Lillico, M.L.C. (Member for Mersey, Legislative Council).

For almost a quarter of a century Braddon was a familiar figure riding a white horse along the roads and tracks of North Western Tasmania. His appearance was striking. He was a wiry man of medium height, his skin was bronzed from exposure, his eyes deep blue and piercing. He cultivated a large grey moustache, which was generally unruly as his long silky hair, upon which a wide straw hat seemed to perch unsteadily. His ordinary dress consisted of a blue velvet riding coat, a white waistcoat and light corduroy trousers; a large carnation or rose usually hung from his button hole.

In 1879 the West Devon seat in the Tasmanian House of Assembly became vacant, rendering a bye-election necessary. In spite of Braddon's brief residence in the district he was elected by an overwhelming majority and entered upon his eventful political career. He was returned at all subsequent elections until he retired from State politics in 1900 to enter the first Federal Parliament. His liberalism and his unshakable views on Free Trade commended him to the majority of the electors. Although as a young man he was a keen follower of John Bright and the Manchester School of Liberalism, he clearly recognised that these ideas did not apply in new pioneering communities. He clearly recognised that 'laissez faire' had no place where Governments had to organise and direct many activities. On the other hand, his views did not include paternalism, rather he believed the State should protect the individual from abuses and tyrannies and provide every opportunity for individual development. Even Braddon's opponents, the conservatives and socialists, admired the persistence with which he fought for progressive developmental policies. The people of the North-West Coast found him an uncompromising fighter for their own interests. An obituary notice in the North-Western Advocate and Emu Bay Times (Feb. 3, 1904), said (he) 'was a terror to the Hobart clique who at one time sought to dominate the colony'.

Braddon was an immediate success in Parliament. He was a fluent, logical and well-informed speaker who quickly came to the point of what he had to say.

Joining the 'Liberal' Opposition he found plenty of scope for talents in attacking the unprogressive, unimaginative, policies of the conservative governments which held office between 1879 and 1887. The little change in their personnel caused them to be called the 'Continuous Ministry'. Thomas Reiby and Phillip Oakley Fysh, (later Sir), the old Liberal leaders, eventually made way for this forcible new recruit. In 1885 Braddon became Leader of the Opposition. Eighteen months later he moved a successful want of confidence motion which led to the resignation of the Agnew Government, the last of the Continuous Ministries. For some time he had suffered from heart strain and he did not form a Government. Instead he entered the Second Fysh administration as Minister for Lands and Works. A few months later, probably for health reasons, he was appointed (29th October, 1888) Agent-General for Tasmania in London in succession to Hon. (later Sir) Adye Douglas, who had resigned. Braddon held this difficult office for five years during a period of financial depression. He experienced the greatest difficulty in arranging loans and raising capital for Tasmanian development. In 1891 Braddon received the well earned honour of knighthood of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George (K.C.M.G.)

On his return to Tasmania, Braddon found his greatest life's task before him. The failure of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land (August, 1891), the Colony's principal financial institution, and the imposition of customs duties on Tasmanian produce entering N.S. Wales had produced an economic crisis of the first magnitude. Both the Fysh and Dobson Governments had failed to take any effective steps to restore confidence and prevent the spread of bankruptcy and unemployment. Braddon was re-elected for West Devon and took his seat as undisputed Leader of the Opposition when the eleventh Parliament opened on 27th February, 1894. On the resignation of the Dobson Ministry he became Premier on the 14th April that year. He remained in office until October 12th, 1899, when he was defeated in committee by some unreliable supporters. It was the longest term of office held by any previous Premier of Tasmania; it has only been exceeded by the present Premier, Hon. Robert Cosgrove.

Braddon's Ministry is believed to have been the first elected by a party caucus in Australia. His old colleagues Fysh, Reiby and Andrew Inglis Clark were included because without them he could not have formed a Government. Braddon set to work with characteristic energy. Accepting no office himself, he was free to deal with policy and its implementation; only in the last year of office (1899) did he become Treasurer.

His ruthless retrenchment of the Civil Service and the reduction of salaries have long been remembered as the 'Braddon Axe'. It was only with the greatest difficulty that his Attorney-General (A. I. Clark) succeeded in preventing the abolition of the young University of Tasmania. Braddon was too wise to rely upon reduction of expenditure to restore economic health. He vigorously applied a policy of development in all of the settled parts of the colony. Amongst his larger schemes were the extension of the railway to Burnie, the rail connection of Strahan and Zeehan, the building of the Emu Bay Railway with British capital and the establishment of large scale mining and smelting operations at Queenstown and Zeehan. His new roads and harbours made possible the development of the potato and apple growing industries. When he left office the Treasury accounts were showing a surplus, the trade balance was favourable, business confidence was restored and the employment situation greatly improved. The Government had legislated in many fields. It had passed the Eight Hours Working Day Bill and had

introduced proportional representation for the city electorates of Hobart and Launceston. When this method was introduced in the 1897 General Elections it caused international interest because it was the largest scale upon which it had ever been applied. Braddon's Government gave strong and consistent support to the Federation Movement, a fact which had an important influence on its consummation.

A fierce light plays upon the characters and actions of Australian Prime Ministers and Premiers. In the passing of over half a century it has not dimmed in the case of Braddon. As recently as March 1952 some of his actions were strongly criticised in the Tasmanian House of Assembly. Braddon was not a complex political character. Enough has been said of his courage, industry, high aims and fine intellect. To some extent he blunted these fine weapons by his ruthlessness, and his management of people by chicane and flattery. The following epigram, which won a prize in a competition conducted by the Hobart journal 'Clipper' tells us how he was seen by keen contemporary political eyes

BRADDON.

'Keen eyed, quick witted, a man who knows
The way to wheedle friends and vanquish foes.'

(September 30th, 1899.)

It was Braddon's part in the Federation Movement which gave him a niche in Australian history. His earliest association with the movement was leader of the Tasmanian delegation to the second session of the Federal Council of Australasia (1888). The movement ran into the shallows after the 1891 Convention, and it was not until the Premier's Conference in Hobart (January, 1895) over which he presided, that it got under way once more. As leader of the Tasmanian delegation to the 1897-98 Convention he was a doughty fighter for the rights and the financial safety of the smaller States in the Federation. He told the Adelaide session (21st April, 1897) quite bluntly that the surrender of customs duties by Tasmania to the Commonwealth, 'would effectually bar entry into Federation'. To Mr. George Reid's suggestion that 'we will pay you £20,000 a year if you are hard up', he fiercely replied 'this is the liberality of words only. I should not like to have to depend upon liberality of that sort. We of Tasmania do not seek to come into Federation as paupers, trusting to the charitable dole of New South Wales'. (Convention proceedings page 1066). The financial problem of the proposed Federation seemed politically insoluble, until he proposed the now famous Braddon Clause. The Clause originally provided that the Commonwealth could only spend four-twentieths of its revenue on the exercise of its original powers and transferred services, the remaining sixteen-twentieths being returned to the States. This clause was bitterly attacked by the Sydney press who dubbed it the 'Braddon Blot'. Nevertheless, it was adopted in principle but its operation was limited for a period of ten years.

Braddon attended Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in London and afterwards he represented Tasmania at the Conference between the Colonial Premiers and the powerful Secretary of State for the Colonies, Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain. At the conference he expressed his faith in Imperial Federation as an ideal means of governing a great Empire. During the Conference, along with the other Premiers, he was created a Privy Councillor. On his return from England he attended the last sessions of the Convention and then took a leading part in the campaign for adoption of the Commonwealth Bill by the Tasmanian electors. In

spite of his seventy years he entered into the campaign with a zest equal to any of the young Federalists. His address to the electors on the occasion of the second referendum (27th July, 1899) given in full might have been written by an ardent young Australian Federalist and Nationalist.

THE COMMONWEALTH ELECTION

ELECTORS OF TASMANIA.

On the 3rd June, 1898, you declared by a four to one vote in favour of the '*Federal Constitution*' adopted by the Melbourne Convention: on the 27th of this month you will be asked to ratify this decision at the Polls, and prove to the world your abundant faith in the cause of Australian nationhood.

Your vote is required on the 27th instant to approve of some few amendments to that Bill, which the popular voice passed by an overwhelming majority on the 3rd June, 1898. These Amendments have been adopted by your brothers of New South Wales and South Australia: only three of them concern Tasmania in any way, and those three are such as you may accept without demur. In the name of our common brotherhood I ask you to be one with the electors of Australia who have led the way in this final Referendum. For the sake of that broader and loftier national life that Federation will assure to us: for the sake of the general welfare which will come with Federation as the consequence of expanded and unshackled trade, and widened industrial development: for the sake of the brotherly amity and national strength that will come with Australian union, I appeal to you to let your voice be heard through the ballot-box on the 27th July, and, by voting 'aye' in sufficient numbers, to feel that you are of those who may justly pride themselves as the builders of a Commonwealth that shall stand without shame side by side with the Powers of the world.

Electors and brother Colonists, do not let apathy steal from you the opportunity of making Tasmania's voice heard through these Southern lands in the epoch-making Referendum of this month. See that your vote in this year largely exceeds in number that of 1898, as do the votes taken in New South Wales and South Australia: see that this cause, which is yours—the People's cause—is carried to a glorious triumph on this coming 27th July.

Hobart, 15th July, 1899.

E. N. C. BRADDON.

At the first Federal Elections held in 1901, Braddon was elected by the Tasmanian electors voting as a whole, to a seat in the new House of Representatives. He was returned for the electorate of Wilmot in the Second Elections (1903). Despite his advancing years he held the position of Deputy Leader of the Opposition. In the absence of his Leader, the witty, redoubtable George Houston Reid, (afterwards Sir), he successfully led the party in tactics and debate against Government leaders which included Edmund Barton, Charles C. Kingston, Alfred Deakin and Sir William Lyne. Death came suddenly to Braddon. He died at Hobart on February 2nd, 1904, and was buried in the little cemetery on the banks of the River Forth, near Leith.

The Commonwealth Jubilee Celebrations included ceremonies in honour of a leading Federalist in each of the States. On Sunday afternoon, May 12th, 1951, an impressive, well-attended ceremony was held in the Devonport Town Hall to honour Braddon's memory. Interest was aroused by a large coloured photograph taken in his prime of life, which was prominently exhibited on the stage. The programme of the ceremony was as follows:—

COMMONWEALTH JUBILEE, 1901-1951.

FOUNDERS OF FEDERATION.

TRIBUTE TO

SIR EDWARD BRADDON,

PREMIER OF TASMANIA, 1894-1899.

DEVONPORT TOWN HALL.

Sunday, 27th May, 1951, 3.15 p.m.

1. Introduction and Welcome.
The Warden, Mr. M. F. Holman.
2. Tribute to Sir Edward Braddon.
Minister for Lands & Works, Hon. E. E. Reece, M.H.A.
3. Message from His Excellency the Administrator, Sir John Morris, Kt.
4. Message from Sir Henry Braddon.
5. Tasmania's contribution to Federation.
Mr. J. Reynolds.
6. Song—"Land of Hope and Glory."
Gwenyth Dixon.

Later in that cold, wet afternoon, wreaths were laid on Braddon's grave at the Forth Cemetery. They were tributes to his memory by the Government of Tasmania, the people of the district amongst whom he lived for a quarter of a century, the Commonwealth Jubilee Committee and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The surrounding bush was quiet and those present stood in silence during the ceremony. It was easy to see those amongst the gathering who remembered the fine old Cornish gentleman who was laid to rest forty-seven years before.